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26 July 1967

EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Dean Rusk
The Secretary of State

SUBJECT: OXCART

1. When we talked together on 26 July, you asked me to provide you with certain specific information about OXCART. It appears below.
2. At the present time three (3) OXCART aircraft are deployed to Kadena AB, Okinawa, for reconnaissance of North Vietnam. Three (3) operational OXCART aircraft are [redacted] flying training and proficiency missions.
3. The USIB requirement for Cuban aerial reconnaissance is ninety percent (90%) photo coverage of the Cuban land mass every fifty-six (56) days. The USAF has been flying an average of three U-2 missions per month to satisfy this requirement.
4. Project OXCART has been maintaining a seven-day quick reaction capability for Cuban reconnaissance since November 1964. Subsequent to initial approval, missions can be launched on a twenty-four hour alert basis. The three operational aircraft [redacted] are presently flying twelve to fifteen test/training missions per month and can satisfy Cuban requirements by substituting operational missions as necessary for similar training missions. (See map attached.) Two aerial refuelings are required. Penetration altitude of above 76,000 feet coupled with high speed (Mach 3.1) and sophisticated Electronics Counter Measures equipment makes the OXCART virtually invulnerable to SAM or aircraft attack. A single flight, weather permitting, will cover in excess of 90% of the island of Cuba providing a fifty-four mile photo swath with resolution from one to three feet.
5. In December 1966 a decision was made to mothball the OXCART fleet at the end of calendar year 1967. In line with this decision the responsibility for maintaining the capability to over-fly Southeast Asia is to be assumed by the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

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on 1 December 1967, utilizing the SR-71 aircraft. The Air Force expects to have an Electronics Counter Measures (ECM) capability, which it now lacks, by 1 October 1967. The Air Force is also forecasting 1 December 1967, as the readiness date for the SR-71 to overfly Southeast Asia. I have no detailed insight into the Air Force progress towards meeting that forecast but do understand there are several problem areas in the process of being resolved.

6. Should there be a decision to extend the phase out date of the OXCART one year to December 1968, the cost would be approximately \$64,000,000. This estimate is based on the assumption that any decision to continue the OXCART program would be made prior to October 1967. This decision date is dictated by the lead time necessary for the procurement of vital replacement items.

(Signed) Richard Helms

Richard Helms
Director

Attachment - map

cc: The Honorable Robert S. McNamara w/att.
The Honorable Walt W. Rostow w/att.

RHelms/ecd - 28/7/67

Distribution: Copy No. 1 - Rusk
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